



# GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DIVISION

**Jeffrey W. Cown, Director**

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**EPD Director's Office**

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June 11, 2026

### **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Board of Natural Resources

FROM: Jeffrey W. Cown, Director  
Environmental Protection Division

SUBJECT: Action on Proposed Grant Criteria for Regional Water Plan Seed Grants, Chapter 391-3-21, Grant Programs

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I request the Board's consideration of updates to the grant criteria for the Regional Water Plan Seed Grant program. The proposed amendments are to Chapter 391-3-21, Grant Programs, and specifically to the rule noted below. These amendments are consistent with the Fair and Open Grants Act, O.C.G.A. §§ 28-5-120 et seq.

I recommend the Board approve the attached program descriptions as presented. If approved, the descriptions will be filed with the Secretary of State's office to comply with the Fair and Open Grants Act.

### **Rule 391-3-21-.09 Regional Water Plan Seed Grant Program**

Under the authority of O.C.G.A. Secs. 12-5-520 et seq. and the State Water Plan, EPD established a Regional Water Plan Seed Grant program that provides funds to eligible recipients in Georgia to support and incentivize local governments and other appropriate water users as they undertake implementation of management practices or recommendations identified in the State's Regional Water Plans. Amendments to the grant criteria for this program include:

- Changing the title of the grant from "Regional Water Plan Seed Grant Program" to "Regional Water Plan Grant Program";
- Moving subparagraph (3)(a) to subparagraph (4)(b), as that provision is a term for the grant, and renumbering subsequent subparagraphs;
- Removing a specific reference to "data and information needs" in subparagraph (4)(a), as that reference is no longer needed;
- Updating language used in subparagraph (4)(c) regarding pre-application meetings;

- Removing the cash match requirement in subparagraph (4)(d), changing the reimbursement amount from 60 to 90 percent, and reducing the minimum total project match requirement amount from 40 to 10 percent;
- Updating the eligible activities for the grant in subparagraph (4)(e);
- Updating the language in paragraph (5) to clarify the selection process for awarding grants;
- Removing redundant language in subparagraph (5)(d);
- Updating the criteria for Council collaboration in subparagraph (5)(f);
- Clarifying the criteria regarding demonstration of additional environmental benefits in subparagraph (5)(h);
- Removing the language referencing negative scoring implications of indirect costs as match in subparagraph (5)(i);
- Removing the reference to a Quality Assurance Project Plan in subparagraph (5)(j), as that Plan is no longer applicable;
- Revising the criteria for a project to be awarded additional points awarded in paragraph (6); and
- Updating the methods for submitting applications in paragraph (7).

The total available grant award funds for SFY 2027 are \$300,000. These funds will represent 90% of the total project cost. Grant recipients will be required to provide the remaining 10% of project costs in the way of match.

A competitive process for selecting projects is used for this grant program. Projects are selected based on the criteria set forth below. Generally, all projects will conform to all applicable requirements of O.C.G.A. §12-5-33(b) and O.C.G.A. § 12-5-520 et seq. and will be consistent with the policies and implementation actions in the Georgia Comprehensive State-wide Water Management Plan. Selected projects will also have been endorsed by the applicable Regional Water Planning Councils. EPD reviews all projects and suggests first time prospective applicants schedule and participate in a pre-application meeting with EPD staff to ensure the application satisfies the general requirements and criteria for the grant award.

For the SFY 2027 cycle, the grant announcement period will begin in July 2026, and the deadline for applications will be October 31, 2026. Subsequent grant announcements and awards will be based upon available funding.

**DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DIVISION**  
**GRANT PROGRAMS, CHAPTER 391-3-21**

**391-3-21-.09 Regional Water Plan Seed Grant Program**

(1) Statutory Basis: O.C.G.A. Secs. 28-5-120 et seq. and Secs. 12-5-520 et seq.

(2) General Scope and Purpose of the Grant Program: The purpose of the grant program is to provide funds to eligible recipients in Georgia to support and incentivize local governments and other appropriate water users as they undertake implementation activities identified in the applicable Regional Water Plans.

(3) Eligible Recipients of the Grant: Eligible recipients of the Regional Water Plan Seed Grant funds include local, regional and State units of government, local authorities which operate local government service delivery programs, regional commissions, resource conservation and development councils, local school systems, State college and universities, and State agencies. Local governments must have Qualified Local Government status as of the date of application, in compliance with the requirements of the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 and Service Delivery Strategy Law of 1997.

~~(a) Applications will include a letter of endorsement signed by the Council Chair or their authorized signatory from the relevant Regional Water Planning Council or Councils that at a minimum describes how the project is consistent with the Council's implementation priorities and the vision and goals articulated in their Regional Water Plan(s).~~

(4) General Terms and Conditions of the Grant: The general terms and conditions of the grant are:

~~(a) Regional Water Plan Seed Grant projects must specifically identify the Regional Water Plan(s) and management practice(s) or other recommendation(s) from each plan (including data and information needs) that the project is designed to address.~~

(b) Applications will include a letter of endorsement signed by the Council Chair or their authorized signatory from the relevant Regional Water Planning Council or Councils that at a minimum describes how the project is consistent with the Council's implementation priorities and the vision and goals articulated in their Regional Water Plan(s).

(bc) Prospective applicants must schedule and participate in a project development pre-application meeting with Division staff to ensure the application satisfies the general requirements as well as more specific criteria. Project development pre-application meetings are not required but are strongly encouraged, especially for first-time applicants. Pre-application meetings with Division staff ensure the application satisfies the general requirements as well as more specific criteria.

(ed) Maximum reimbursement for a Regional Water Plan Seed Grant project is 60-90 percent of the total project cost. Therefore, each recipient must provide matching funds for a minimum of 40

~~10 percent of the total project cost. Of the required 40 percent match, a minimum of 10 percent of the total project cost must be in the form of a cash match. The cash match must be expended to pay for specific elements of the project budget and may not include indirect costs, equipment operation costs, or in-kind services.~~

~~(de)~~ Types of activities that are eligible include:

- ~~i. undertaking programs to address critical information and/or data needs identified in the Regional Water Plan(s);~~
- ~~ii. tracking and analyzing available monitoring data and reporting on water resource conditions identified in the Regional Water Plan(s);~~
- ~~iii. preparing and distributing technical guidance that address management practices in two or more water planning regions;~~
- i. undertaking programs to address long-term water needs through enhanced water conservation;
- ii. promoting agricultural, forestry, rural, and urban best management practices to improve water quality;
- iii. evaluating additional or alternate to existing surface water and/or groundwater supply sources;
- iv. developing and/or updating local utility master plans for water, wastewater and stormwater;
- ~~iv. providing technical assistance to support implementation of Regional Water Plan(s) management practices; or~~
- v. undertaking other specific implementation activities identified in the Regional Water Plan(s).

~~(ef)~~ Regional Water Plan Seed-Grant projects must conform to all applicable requirements of O.C.G.A. §12-5-33(b) and O.C.G.A. § 12-5-520 et seq. and must be consistent with the policies and implementation actions in the Georgia Comprehensive State-wide Water Management Plan.

(5) Criteria for the Award: The Regional Water Plan Seed-Grant funds are limited and are contingent upon available funding. Each project proposal will be evaluated by the Division to determine if the proposed project is an eligible activity, and all eligible project proposals will be ranked evaluated and selected for funding based on the selection criteria below. ~~The Division funds projects starting with the highest ranking score first and will continue awarding funds to those qualifying applications until the total amount funded reaches the total available amount. The~~ Division reserves the right to coordinate with applicants as needed to modify project scopes and budgets to allow for modified project funding.

(a) Project proposals must specifically identify the Regional Water Plan or Plans and management practice(s) or other recommendation(s) from each plan that the project is designed to implement;

- i. Projects that are located within the Metro Water District, or applicants who are located within the Metro Water District, are eligible to apply for a seed-grant if all of the following apply:
  1. The project will provide benefits in one or more of the neighboring Water Planning Council regions,
  2. The project addresses implementation of one or more management practices or other recommendations from the Regional Water Plans for those regions, and
  3. The application is endorsed by the neighboring Water Planning Council(s) in those regions.
- ii. If the project addresses data or information needs, the applicant must 1) specify the connections between the data to be collected and specific management practice(s) or other recommendation(s)

in the Regional Water Plan(s) and 2) demonstrate how the data to be collected will be applied or integrated in the Regional Water Plan(s) or plan implementation.

(b) Project proposals must be consistent with the implementation priorities and the vision and goals articulated in the applicable Regional Water Plan(s). To ensure this consistency, proposals must demonstrate significant coordination between the applicant, Council(s), and the Division during preparation of the application and throughout the awarded project;

(c) Project proposals must demonstrate the state, regional and/or local benefits of the project including but not limited to enhancing water supply or water quality improvements that also provide water supply benefits;

(d) Project proposals must demonstrate how the project will enable continued and new implementation of Regional Water Plan management practices or other Regional Water Plan recommendations;

~~i. Applications that do not clearly demonstrate this will not be considered for funding.~~

(e) Project proposals must demonstrate how the effectiveness of the project will be evaluated (i.e., measure of success), and numerical measures should be used where appropriate;

(f) Project proposals should demonstrate collaboration with ~~multiple~~ one or more Regional Water Planning Councils, cooperating partnerships, and/or multi-governmental agencies and local implementing actors;

(g) Project proposals should demonstrate coordination with other water management projects and activities within the watershed as well as projects conducted across jurisdictional boundaries;

(h) Project proposals should demonstrate any additional environmental benefits that are expected to result from the project ~~including but not limited to protection of in-stream flows, water conservation, air quality and energy conservation;~~

(i) Project proposals should demonstrate cost effectiveness of both grant and match funds. Cost effectiveness is defined as having the largest possible impact with the funds available;

~~i. Project proposals utilizing indirect costs as a sole source of match will not score as well due to a reduction of cost effectiveness.~~

(j) If a project proposal includes water quality monitoring, ~~a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) will be required. If the data will be submitted to the Division for listing or delisting purposes,~~ a Sampling and Quality Assurance Plan (SQAP) will ~~instead~~ be required. The requirements for a SQAP are contained in EPD's Guidance On Submitting Water Quality Data For Use By The Georgia Environmental Protection Division In 305(b)/303(d) Listing Assessments (SQAP), which can be found on the Division's website.

(k) Project applicants who have received grant funds in past years but have *NOT* demonstrated successful administration of previous Section 319(h), Section 106, Section 604(b) or other grant funded projects may receive a reduction in points during project review. Successful administration

includes but is not limited to: completing all project activities during the contract period, meeting all required deadlines, completing the project on time and on budget, expending all grant funds requested on project activities, and providing adequate documentation as requested by the Division.

(6) Additional points may also be awarded to projects that demonstrate:

(a) A match commitment of ~~50~~30 percent of total project cost or higher; ~~or~~

(b) ~~A cash match commitment of 20 percent of total project cost or higher.~~ A match commitment from a source other than the lead organization; or

(c) Project proposals that demonstrate collaboration with multiple Regional Water Planning Councils.

(7) Directions and Deadlines for Applying: Applicants interested in applying for a Regional Water Plan ~~Seed~~ Grant should contact the Division's Grants Regional Water Planning Unit or visit the Division's website for specific application assistance. Any project proposal that does not satisfy all grant criteria or does not follow the Division's application requirements may not be reviewed or considered for funding.

~~Applications should be submitted to:  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
Environmental Protection Division  
Watershed Protection Branch  
ATTN: Grants Unit  
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Dr.  
Suite 1462 East  
Atlanta, GA 30334~~

Applications must be submitted online through the Division's grant administration portal. No paper or email applications will be considered for funding.

Additional grant information, application materials, assistance preparing an application and staff contact information may be found at the Division's website, [www.epd.georgia.gov](http://www.epd.georgia.gov).

**Deadline for submitting proposals:** Applications for grant award will be solicited via advertisement on the web address above no later than July of each year; applications will be due no later than October; and selections will be made no later than February. Specific application timeframes will be available via the website above.

Authority: O.C.G.A. Secs. 28-5-120 et seq. and Secs. 12-5-520 et seq.